

X

*Constant Readiness for Christ's Final
Appearance, urged from the Un-
certainty of the Time of it.*

The SUBSTANCE of
TWO SERMONS

PREACHED AT
MORLEY, near Leeds, Yorkshire.

ON

The LORD'S DAY, April 17th, 1768.

By **WILLIAM WHITAKER.**

Being the last he ever preached.

*In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not
thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper.*

Eccles. xi. 6.

————— *If e'er with ill success,
LIVING I strove important truths to press,
Your precious, your immortal souls to save,
Hear me, at least, Oh! hear me from THE GRAVE!*

193
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THE pious author of the following discourses (with whom I had carried on an agreeable and useful correspondence ever since we were fellow-students) wrote me a letter from *Leeds*, (dated May 18. 1770), of which the following is an extract; which may serve, instead of his own Preface, to give the reader an account of his view in printing these papers: — “ And now, my friend, “ let me mention to you a scheme which I have “ in hand, and which will probably be the last “ I shall have an opportunity of concerting for “ the glory of God. You must know the last “ sermon I ever preached was on *Mat. xxiv. 44.* “ An awful subject! and made doubly so by the “ event, which, with me, took place that same “ night. This (though far from being the best “ sermon I ever preached) I have some thoughts “ of printing, and leaving orders that a copy of “ it shall be given to every head of a family “ belonging to our place. I am in hopes, the “ subject, and other circumstances, may procure “ it a saving attention from those who heard it “ without any regard. Now, will you give me “ leave to beg the favour of you to be the Editor? My health is such, that I cannot possibly correct the press. — I design to prefix to “ it a short address to the reader, on the danger “ of delaying the concerns of the soul in hopes “ of such a death as mine. I have written a “ good part of it; but whether I shall be able “ to finish it, I know not. I am very weak, and “ die daily. I cannot live many months, and “ probably may not live many weeks. I wish to

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“ do good while I do live, and hope, that by
“ the means above mentioned, I may do good
“ after I am dead; for I do not propose any of
“ them to be seen before. If you will assist me
“ in this my last labour of love, I will send you,
“ as soon as I can, the copy which Mr. D——
“ is now transcribing from my short hand.”

The copy I received *June* 12. and with it the melancholy news of the author's death, which happened *June* 7. but two days after he had dictated a letter to me, containing instructions with respect to the printing his work. These, it may be proper here to assure the reader, I have faithfully observed. The work is printed as I received it, excepting that I have transposed a note, which appears at the end in the form of a *Post-script*; and made a few such small corrections as it might be easily imagined a discourse hastily composed for a plain audience, and transcribed from a short-hand copy by another hand, would require; to which the author, through his extreme weakness, was unable to attend. If the critical reader shall yet discern the want of perfect exactness, it is hoped he will candidly attend to the circumstances of the case. I have only to add my fervent prayer, that the divine blessing may accompany this pious effort of my dying friend for answering the great end he proposed by it, and to which he had devoted his life; the glory of God in the salvation of immortal souls.

Hackney, *June* 25.

1770.

S. PALMER.



A N



A N

ADDRESS to the READER

O N

The Danger of delaying the Concerns of
the Soul, in hope of a lingering Illness.

CHRISTIAN READER,

NO one, I believe, ever thought less of publishing a sermon when composing it, than I did of publishing this. An awful circumstance has however determined me to do it. It was the last I ever preached: The same evening, after my return from *Morley*, where I had delivered it, a blood vessel broke in my lungs, and finished my capacity for usefulness, as a preacher, in an instant. A circumstance which I hoped might procure it some extraordinary degree of attention, especially from those who had a personal value for me.

Another reason was, that it would give me an opportunity of bearing my dying testimony against that delusion of delusions by which I am persuaded Satan undoes more souls than by all his other devices, I mean the hopes of a death-bed repentance, grounded on the presumption of a lingering death. This, I flatter myself, I may be able to do with some advantage (notwithstanding

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withstanding my present very weak circumstances, and utter unfitness to treat any subject with accuracy) as I have seen so much of the flattery and delusions of a decline, during that long and tedious indisposition, through which the Almighty, in the course of his all-wise providence, has called me to pass. This is the sole design of this introductory address.

I know the generality of mankind are so far from having any formidable apprehensions of a consumption, that they think it affords a most happy opportunity of preparing for the coming of the Lord; and in the hopes of dying such a lingering death, often alas! put off that which their conscience tells them is their duty, and which they would not for the world have left finally undone. When they think of the fever, the palsy, the apoplexy, or the cholic, they are alarmed; fear chills all their members, and they are almost persuaded to flee from the wrath to come. But as to a consumption, it carries no terrors with it; so far from it, that they think, if they may but be so happy as to die of this disorder, all will be safe enough. They will then have plenty of time to reflect upon their past lives, to humble themselves before God, to apply to the blood of Jesus, and the grace of the Spirit; and that they shall moreover have so many daily calls to attend to, and improve this favourable opportunity, that there is little danger of their neglecting to improve it. This is all a delusion! a dreadful delusion, big with the eternal ruin of most, if not all, who trust to it. A consumption affords none of those favourable opportunities of acquainting ourselves with God, and preparing for eternity, which it
so



so speciously promises. No. Like the harlot, it smiles only that it may the more easily *delude*.

This, Reader, is not the rash hasty declaration of a recluse immured in his closet, but the deliberate opinion of one who has past through the various stages of this most deceitful disorder, and grounded upon his own observation during a long course of trial: of one whose firm persuasion it is concerning his own soul, that if it had not been prepared before he fell ill, he had been undone for ever, (tho' no one was ever carried on in a manner more apparently favourable) and whose experience makes him as certain, that if thou trust to it, for making thy peace with God, it will as certainly undo thee. Bear with me, Christian Reader, while I offer thee some of those observations which have induced me to be of an opinion so very different from that of the generality of mankind. If they appear only the hasty conclusions of a person rendered fretful by a long course of sufferings, then continue thy former hopes; but if thy conscience tells thee, as I am persuaded it will, that they are just, dread one moment longer to pursue a course which may be attended with the most fatal consequences. Oh remember that awful declaration, The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place, and your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then shall ye be trodden down. *Isaiah xxviii. 17. 18.*

The reason, I presume, why this disorder has been generally thought so favourable to the great

work of faith and repentance, is, that it is in itself extremely dangerous; yet attended with no great apparent pain or distress, and generally continues for a long time. Hence it is, I suppose, come to be thought favourable, both as affording *calls* to thoughtfulness, and *time* for exercising it. It must be confessed there appears something specious in this. One would imagine, considering how generally fatal all kinds of consumptions are, that they would at once alarm the person seized with them, and put him upon an *immediate* attention to the things that belong to his peace; in which case, he would generally have considerable time for it. Yet, surprising as it may appear, this is so far from being the case in fact, that it is passed into a common proverb, that *a consumptive man never thinks himself in danger*. The justice of this I scarce knew how to allow, till I came to experience it. But I am now convinced that it is an awful truth, well deserving the attention of all those who depend upon this as a season for repentance.

The disorder alarms others, but it seldom creates any great alarm to the patient himself, till he comes to the very last stages of it; and perhaps not then neither, as nothing is more common than for a consumptive man to die in his chair or on a couch.—To this insensibility of danger a variety of things contribute.

One is, the *gradual and interrupted manner* in which this distemper proceeds. When the impetuous warrior, who by raising battery upon battery, destroys his enemy's defences in a moment, and abruptly breaks into a country, he creates instant terror wherever he approaches: Even the most
ignorant

ignorant and stupid are alarmed, and put upon making use of every method of defence: Whilst he who proceeds more cautiously by sap, (whatever alarm he may give the garrison, who are aware of the danger of such a proceeding), seldom alarms the inhabitants much, till they see all about them ready to tumble into ruins. Thus, when those more furious emissaries of that great conqueror death, the plague, the fever, the apoplexy, the palsy, &c. appear, they create instantaneous alarm; persons cannot have the least apprehension of their approach without terror; but the consumption gives no such alarm: It's approaches are so gradual, that it does not appear to bring death much nearer to view than whilst in health. On the first seizure, what is more common than for a person to say, "I have only got a little cough, or a slight fever; it will soon go off again; I have often had such complaints before now, and never was any worse for them: Colds generally affect me in this manner, but I shall be better in a few days." In a few days, probably, his disorder abates a little, and then he concludes he is well. It returns again; again he hopes and talks as before. He sees his flesh waste, and feels his strength abate, but hopes soon to get rid of his cough, or fever, or sweats, and then he shall soon recover his flesh and strength, he does not doubt. Thus he goes on *deluding* himself, while all around him see his danger plainly enough. And what enables him to do it the more easily is, that as this disorder does not in general bring a person down very fast till towards the last; in order to be sensible of his decline, he must compare what he is to day, not with what he was yesterday or the day before, but with some more

distant period; which a person in such circumstances is seldom disposed to do. It is natural to every one, I believe, to take up with the shorter comparison, and then it is easy to see what the conclusion will be.

The slow progress of this disorder also creates less alarm, as it affords hope from *futurity*, which other disorders will not give time for. The patient finds himself indeed growing weaker; but “it is owing to the excessive heats of the summer: In autumn he shall be better.” Perhaps he finds himself a little recruited by that mild season. The winter, then he becomes confident, will perfect all, and quite brace him up. On the contrary he finds his cough increase by that severe season, and that the confinement it occasions contributes further to break down his constitution. Well,—He hopes, and his friends encourage him to hope, that the spring will set all right, and free him from all his complaints. So the excellent *Watts* was dealt with, as he himself relates in the following lines:

Yet my fond friends would speak a word of hope.
Love would forbid despair.—Look out, they cry,
Beyond these glooming damps, while winter hangs
Heavy on nature, and congeals her power,
Look chearful forwards to the vital influence
Of the returning spring.——

Miscel. Thoughts, No. 47. p. 178.

Thus do our friends fatally flatter us with
hopes of a May sun-beam, whilst not one of
them

them is kind enough to hint at those cold north-east blasts we must feel before the arrival of that reviving season, and by which so many thousands of invalids are, in this unsettled climate, every spring sent into eternity; and so many more so broken down as soon to fall a prey to the heats of the summer. Fatal friendship!

But this is not the only instance in which our friends cruelly lend their assistance to help forwards the delusions of this naturally too delusive disorder. One brings you a remedy for a consumption that has cured this person and the other person, and never was known to miss, if taken in time. If you have faith in such kind of nostrums, this is sure to keep up your hopes till the event undeceive you, and shews it to be a broken reed, which pierces the hand instead of supporting it. Another bids you not to be discouraged; nothing is more common than for persons to continue weakly a long time, and after all recover their health again. I myself was told of one who recovered after being confined to his house for five years. When you are a little recovered from one of the paroxysms of the disorder, they are sure to tell you how much better you look than when they saw you last, and this not only during the first approaches of the disorder, but even to the last, if they can but recollect any one period in which you looked worse. In short, as the danger of this disorder is well known to be more certain than that of any other whatever, and the case of those who are seized, of consequence more hopeless, so there is no one in which it seems to be more the united view of all around them to keep out of sight as much as possible whatever might create any alarm. If

any are so thoughtless, or so much your friends, as to act a contrary part, and plainly tell you their opinion, if you are not peculiarly happy in those about you, 'tis odds but effectual care is taken that they shall never more see you again: whilst, whenever the distemper will permit, your friends of a different stamp will as certainly be encouraged to get about you as much as they can, in order to keep up your spirits, or in other words, to keep off reflection: and in this they are generally too successful. Thus do friends and disorder join together, to keep the patient ignorant of his real case, and prevent him from making any spiritual improvement of it.

But it may be asked, are there no periods in this disorder wherein this deluder cannot cheat? When the patient cannot but be sensible that he is in very imminent danger? Yes, there are. Oh! the agonizing pains some feel, when every breath they draw is, as it were, tearing to pieces the tenderest membranes in the human body. Oh! the inexpressible anguish which others feel from an obstructed respiration, when the lungs refuse to fill, and the patient is brought almost to the agonies of death: Oh! the insupportable depressions of others, when their souls faint within them: what they feel none can tell, but those who have felt the like. But these, Reader, are times for *exercising*, not for *acquiring* christian graces. The christian, in such circumstances, finds it quite labour enough to keep his mind in a composed frame, and with a filial temper to submit to the afflictive will of his heavenly Father. It cost me, in these paroxysms, many a sigh and tear to keep mine so; yea, and after all, I had frequent occasion to humble myself before God, that I bare
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not his will more submissively. Is this then a time (I appeal to thy conscience) is this a time to begin to do any thing for eternity? If thou suspectest me of misrepresenting matters, or setting things out more strongly than is needful, take the opportunity of applying to the next of thy acquaintance, who is in such circumstances. I will not say, Go and ask him what ability he finds to settle the great account between God and his soul? The question might probably get thee an immediate exclusion from his room. But take an opportunity to ask him to settle some account, or talk over some intricate affair, his answer, I dare say, will be, "Do not trouble me with your accounts now; am I in any condition to attend to business, do you think? I could not do it, were it to save my life." Indeed! Then where will thy prudence be, Reader, if thou leavest the great account between God and thy soul to be settled in such circumstances? If he cannot run with footmen without being wearied, how wilt thou be able to contend with horses, *Jer. xii. 5.*

But when this extremity of pain is a little abated, may it not then be hoped that the season will be favourable? No. The old delusions soon return. The intermissions, even to the last, are regarded as the sure earnest, at least as affording good hope, of a recovery; and no sooner is the severity of pain or languishing of the disorder a little gone off, than the patient begins to think himself in but little danger. I speak this from experience. Perhaps thou wilt not think it, Reader, yet I assure thee it is true; that though my legs have begun to swell, so as to be burdensome to me; though I am every night emaciated with the most dreadful sweats, and every morning
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cough up large quantities of thick matter from my lungs; and though my pen, which used to be *the pen of a tolerably ready writer*, now so shakes in my hand, that I can scarce write legibly; yet if I did not exercise my reason and judgment, there are times in which I should think myself in little danger. But what room is there to believe that he will exercise his reason, who is conscious that he is utterly unfit for death, and expects to behold nothing after it but blackness and darkness? How much more ground is there to fear that he will indulge the pleasing delusion, till it end in his everlasting ruin?

The above is designed to shew how little prospect there is, that a sinner will ever be awakened to faith and repentance during a decline, and therefore how highly dangerous it is to delay one moment in the great things that belong to our peace, in hopes of dying of such a disorder. Give me leave now to change the scene, and to add, that supposing it had all that tendency to awaken to faith and repentance, which some seem so fondly to imagine, what reason have we to hope that God will, by his grace, give efficacy to it? And yet without this, what hopes can we have of success, even from the most likely means? It was a bold expression of a certain great preacher, yet not more bold than true, "Though God were
" to shake an unconverted sinner over the pit of
" hell, however it might frighten him, it would
" not convert him." No, Reader; to this something else is necessary, even that *divine blessing*, without which, *Paul may plant and Apollos water*, without success. But what reason have we to hope, that God will afford his converting grace to those who have wilfully trifled away their season

son of grace, and refused to work till the time of working is over? Where is there one instance in all scripture, except that of the thief upon the cross, (which being a case that can never happen again, is by no means a proper precedent) of a person savingly called, after the season for working was over? I know of none. I read, indeed, of persons of the most abandoned characters washed and sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of God, *1 Cor. vi. 11.* and of a *Paul* obtaining mercy; that in him, as the chief of sinners, Christ might shew forth a pattern of all long-suffering to them that should hereafter believe, *1 Tim. i. 15, 16.* Nay, and I read of some being called into the vineyard at the eleventh hour, *Mat. xx. 6.* when they had but one hour to work; but of none called after the twelfth. No; the door seems then to be shut, and nothing left but for the Lord to take an account of his labourers. An awful consideration this for a sinner, who neglects to prepare for the coming of Christ, in hopes of a death-bed repentance. Reader, whoever thou art, may it have its due weight with thee. Methinks it may well make thee tremble, if thou art an unconverted man, to think upon what a precipice thou standest. Oh! think of it, and dread to trust to any thing to be done, when thou art capable of active service no longer. To-day, while it is called to-day, begin to prepare for eternity, lest the Lord swear thou shalt not enter into his rest at all. And concerning whom have we more reason to fear he is uttering this awful excluding oath, than concerning those who have wilfully trifled away all the time in which they were capable of serving him, in hopes of repenting when they could serve him no longer.

But supposing all these difficulties got over; supposing that, by a miracle of divine grace, thou art awakened in this most dangerous state to such a sense of thy undone condition as humbles thee thoroughly at the foot of Jesus, produces that godly sorrow for sin which worketh repentance not to be repented of, and which would have brought forth fruits meet for repentance, if opportunity had not been wanting. In this case, I doubt not thy state is safe. But what evidence canst thou in such circumstances have that it really is so? Our Lord says, by their fruits ye shall know them, *Mat.* vii. 20. and orders us to discover the reality of our relation to him by letting our light so shine before men, that they seeing our good works, may glorify our Father which is in heaven, *Mat.* v. 16. In like manner also the apostle *James* says, that by works is faith made perfect, *Jam.* ii. 22. that is, illustrated and discovered to be real. But we have no other scripture criterion that I know of. All others are the inventions of men, consequently liable to deceive. What reasonable evidence then canst thou have that thy state is good, even supposing that it be so? I know well there are some who will encourage thee to trust to certain impulses and feelings; who talk of receiving satisfactory assurance from seeing Christ holding out his arms to receive them; from dreams, and strong impressions on their spirits, which assure them they are the children of God: but as these are no scripture marks, a wise man will be very cautious how he trusts to them. When he considers to what a pitch the imagination may be worked up, he will always doubt such evidences as these; especially he will always have a doubt of them in such disorders as we are now treating of. The body being weak,
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and the spirits, for the most part brisk, such impressions on the fancy, either from the operations of our own imagination, or the great enemy of souls, are easily made. We often perceive them in persons in such circumstances, with regard to common things; and what strange agitations are sometimes occasioned thereby!

No wonder, then, if (without any divine operations in the case) the terrified uninformed mind be elevated with religious imaginations; such as that *God is theirs; Christ's blood is shed for them; the devil has no part in them, &c.* after conversing with persons of an enthusiastic turn, whose whole discourse consisted of such phrases as these, injudiciously applied: and therefore every prudent person will be very cautious how he rests on such evidence, or indeed takes any comfort from it, till he has had some opportunity of proving its genuineness by its fruits.

Indeed it may justly make one very cautious with respect to all kinds of evidence not accompanied by works, when we consider how few of those who have been awakened on, what they imagined to be, a death-bed, ever kept their vows and resolutions when they recovered. For my own part, I do not know one. And though I believe there have been some few instances of this kind, yet the number is so very few, compared with those who have returned again to folly, and perhaps become sevenfold more the children of hell than before, as may well make a man tremble who thinks of a death-bed delusion, and doubt of every evidence of his own change, if he has not an opportunity of proving it by its fruits.

How uncomfortable then, Reader, must thy situation be, even supposing thou art really converted, in this most inconvenient season! While the christian, who served God from his youth, is rejoicing in the consideration that he remembers, and ever will remember, the kindness of his youth; and taking encouragement thence; not only to stay himself upon his God, but to rejoice in him amidst all his trials and afflictions, thou art beclouded with doubts and fears, with only a bare *Who can tell but the Lord may be gracious?* And when, on the other hand, these sensible joys are fled from thy fellow-christian, and he can only trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God, because conscious that in the main he has feared the Lord, and obeyed the voice of his servants; how dismal must thy soul be, how full of doubts, fears, and suspicions as to all thou hast felt, and of dismal forebodings concerning what is future.

Come now then, and let us reason together. Is the consumption a desirable season, to which to put off the great work of faith and repentance? Is it a disorder in itself likely to awaken thee, or afford thee any peculiar means of awakening? Is there any reason to hope that God will ever bless thee with the aids of his good Spirit, if thou thus wilfully triflest away the time of health, in hopes of a death-bed repentance? Or canst thou have any thoroughly satisfactory evidence of thy good state, supposing thee converted, if thou delayest to this most unfavourable season, or canst thou ever die comfortably without it? Say then, does a consumption appear a favourable season of acquainting ourselves with God, and preparing for eternity? Does it not appear less favourable to thee
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than it once did, from what has now been suggested? Yet I have not been able to tell thee half. Oh! that I could describe to thee half what I have felt in myself, of the extreme unfitness of this season for so great a work: Oh! that I could lay before thee, in a view one half as striking as they have often appeared to me, the delusions of the former, and the extreme languor and listlessness of the latter part of this most tedious disorder, wherein, literally speaking, the grass-hopper is a burden! But I cannot. My weak shattered frame forbids it. It is a wonder I have been able to say so much. But from what I have, judge of what I have *not*, been able to lay before thee, and then ask thyself seriously, whether it be not best immediately to fall in with the wise man's advice, *Eccles. ix. 10.* And whatsoever thy hand findeth thee to do, to do it with all thy might? Then mayest thou hope to die with comfort whatever death is appointed to thee, and to lift up thy head with rejoicing, amidst all the future horrors of a dissolving world.

W. W.

The reader will perceive that in the foregoing address, the pious author, in dissuading persons against deferring the momentous concerns of the soul and eternity while health and strength are continued, has argued on the supposition that they should die of a lingering illness, and thus have timely warning of their latter end. But all who depend upon this, might here naturally be reminded, that they are chargeable with a most unwarrantable presumption. Supposing a decline were ever so favourable to a due preparation for death and judgment, it were madness to defer
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this necessary business, since none have the least rational ground to expect such indulgence, there being numberless *other* disorders by which mortals are carried to their long home; and we frequently see death sent without a moment's previous notice. The reason why this consideration was omitted here (if the author lived to finish this address) most probably was, that it is particularly insisted upon in the last of the following discourses, where that part of the text is illustrated, *at such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.*

S. P.



DISCOURSE I.

M A T. xxiv. 44.

Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh.

TH E S E words follow as an inference from the care which men invariably take to secure their property against those, from whom they imagine it may be in danger, especially when they are beforehand apprized of it. But know this (says our Lord) that if the good man of the house had known at what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh, *q. d.* “ When
“ a man has any reason to apprehend his pro-
“ perty in danger, he spares no pains nor care to
“ secure it; and were he at any time aware of a
“ sudden invasion, he would double his diligence.
“ Imitate this care in a matter of infinitely greater
“ consequence, the interest of *your souls*, which,
“ I now solemnly assure you, are in constant
“ danger, if not habitually prepared for that aw-
“ ful day, in which I am to judge the world in
“ righteousness, and render to every man as his
“ works shall be.” But, alas! men in general
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are far more provident and cautious in matters that concern their present, than in those which concern their eternal interest. They guard their bodies and their goods with the utmost care ; yet, by a piece of the most absurd and unaccountable stupidity, leave their souls an open prey to the destroyer. They need no argument, but the possibility of danger, to keep them watchful in the former case ; in the latter, they need every possible motive, and frequently, alas ! after having heard the most persuasive and alarming ones, still continue careless and insensible. Happy would it be, even for the children of light, were they always as attentive to their eternal interests, as the men of the world, in general, are to their temporal. But, alas ! they also often strangely forget themselves, and seem but little influenced by eternal things, though we have reason to believe they never wholly disregard them. A discourse, therefore, on this subject, can never be unseasonable nor unprofitable, least of all when Providence gives us awful examples of the reality and continued existence of the motive by which the exhortation is enforced. The person *, whose sudden removal from time to eternity turned my thoughts to these words, was, within a few days of his death, as likely for life as any of us, and more likely than most of us ; and yet he was cut off so suddenly, as to have but few minutes, if any, between the time when he first had reason to apprehend himself in immediate danger of death, and when he was utterly incapable of pre-

* This sermon was first preached to a congregation of Protestant Dissenters, in *Callane Leeds*, November, 1766, on occasion of the death of Mr. JOHN WARHAM, who died very suddenly of a violent fever. Afterwards at *Morley*, April 17, 1768, the last time the Author preached.

paring for it. His case may, for any thing you know, be yours. Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh.

The words of the text contain an extensive and important exhortation, backed by a most awful and cogent motive. The *exhortation* is to a state of habitual preparation for the coming of Christ. The *motive*, because we know not how soon he may come. Let us consider each a little in the order in which they present themselves. And may God so impress our minds with the importance of the motive, as to determine us all, in an humble dependance on his grace, immediately and steadily to comply with the exhortation. We begin with considering,

I. The exhortation: *Be ye also ready.*

We are here, brethren, probationers for eternity, under the inspection of God, the great moral governor of the world. From him we received all our talents and privileges: to him we are accountable for them, and he has appointed a day in which he will bring every work into judgment. For this it is that we are to be ready. Ready as stewards, to give an account of our stewardship, whenever he, whom we serve, thinks fit that we should be stewards no longer. Ready as servants to account to their master, for any trust reposed in them, whenever he sees fit to call for their accounts. We may then be said to be ready, whenever we are in such circumstances that we can give an account of the things done in the body, with joy, and not with grief. But,

To this readiness, many things are necessary, *e. g.* that we have seriously attended to the reality and importance of this event; that we have used our utmost endeavours to prepare for it; that we keep it habitually in view, and are frequently examining into our situation with relation to it.—Readiness for Christ's coming, implies,

1. That we have seriously attended to the reality and infinite importance of this event.

Previous to all concern about the coming of Christ, there must be a deep conviction of the infinite worth of our souls, of the awful nature of an eternal state, of the near connection we have with it, and the vast importance of being prepared for it. Now, wherever a person is duly apprized of the importance of these great realities, he will be highly concerned to know, not only in general wherewith he may come before the Lord, but how he is prepared for an appearance at his tribunal; and will therefore seriously examine how his past life has agreed with the requirements of the gospel, and how far his heart has been formed by them: whether he be such in temper and conduct, as will bear the test of that great and terrible day, when the fire shall try every man's work of what kind it is.

Such a concern to know what our state is, with respect to an awful hereafter, naturally results from, and is always produced by, a due sense of the worth of the soul, and the importance of an eternal world; though sometimes it is in a most alarming, and at others in a less impressive degree. For can a man think of a soul that never dies; of a state that shall never end; a state of
happi-

happiness or misery, as exquisite in its nature as it is boundless in its duration; of an awful judgment day, when this immortal soul shall enter on one or other of those infinitely different and eternal states, without the possibility of ever changing more; I say, can a man think of these infinitely momentous topics, and not seriously enquire in what state his soul is for this awful day? No. It is impossible. He may neglect to give these things a thorough examination, and it is still more possible that he may never act upon his convictions; but some sober thoughts about the consequences of Christ's coming with regard to himself, and some enquiry into the state of his soul, it is impossible to avoid, if a man gives these obvious, yet infinitely important truths the least attention. If then we are strangers to this serious attention to the reality and importance of Christ's coming, and this consequent self-examination, we may depend upon it we are not ready for it, and therefore have the utmost reason to be alarmed at the thoughts of the suddenness of his approach, who will render to every man according to his works, and fix the souls of all those who shall then be found unprepared, in unchangeable and inconceivable wretchedness.—Readiness for the coming of Christ implies further,

2. That we have used our utmost endeavours to prepare for it.

This as naturally follows from a conviction of the worth of the soul as the former, and as invariably attends it, wherever it is real. We cannot be sensible of the worth of our souls, without desiring that they may be safe in that day, and being heartily willing to comply with whatever is

necessary to their being so. A little self-enquiry will be sufficient to convince every impartial person that all is not right: that neither the temper of his mind, nor the conduct of his life, has been such, as to merit the approbation of that peerless Being, who looks to the moon and it shineth not, and in whose sight the heavens themselves are not clean. Such an examination will also convince him that the law is holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good, *Rom. vii. 12.* such as reason requires; and conscience, when fairly admitted to speak, approves. This gives him to see, that God would be just in inflicting upon him all the penalties with which an observance of it is enforced; and that the alteration necessary to their being at an agreement together, must, and ought to be, in his temper and conduct, and not in the requirements of God's law. Now wherever this affects the soul in a proper manner, it will produce a thorough humiliation for past sins, on account of their native impropriety, as well as their dangerous consequences; and such a godly sorrow for sin as worketh repentance not to be repented of, and engages (under the influence of Divine grace) to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. It will produce also a most serious enquiry about the way of salvation, and a hearty willingness to fall in with any method, however painful and humbling, by which the soul may be safe in the day of the Lord Jesus. What must I do to be saved? was the earnest anxious enquiry of the trembling awakened jailer. What must I do to be saved? is the enquiry of every one properly awakened to a sense of his guilt and misery. Things now appear to a person in a new and widely different view. Sin appears exceeding sinful in its nature, and infi-

nitely dangerous in its consequence; and the creature, whose only concern once was, What shall I eat, or what shall I drink, or wherewithal shall I be cloathed? (Perhaps, alas! How shall I most effectually make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof?) is now only concerned how he may escape the wrath to come, and lay hold on eternal life. When a person is thus brought to a proper sense of his guilt and misery, he sees at once the necessity of such a Saviour as Jesus, both with respect to the present power, and final punishment of sin, and therefore esteems it a saying worthy all acceptation (his own as well as others) that Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And being fully persuaded that he is an undone creature, and that there is no other name given under heaven among men, whereby he can be saved than the name of Jesus, nor any salvation by him without faith in him, *Acts* iv. 12. *John* viii. 24. he willingly commits his soul into his hands, with particular reference to that day, in a chearful firm persuasion, that he is able and willing to keep that which he has committed to him. On him, as the Lamb of God, appointed to take away the sins of the world, he chearfully ventures his whole salvation; to his instructions and commands, as the great Prophet and King of his church, he resolves, through Divine grace, universally to submit. His example, so far as human infirmities will admit, he is determined steadily to follow; and yet when he has done all, he looks upon himself as only an unprofitable servant, and expects the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life, as the free gift of God in and through him.

This is the only way (according to my apprehension of the gospel plan of redemption) in which we can prepare for the coming of Christ; and therefore without having experienced something of this kind, I dare not encourage any to hope, that they are ready for it. Before this can be the case, there must be a conviction of our undone condition; a serious solicitude about the way of salvation; a full persuasion of the suitableness and sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ as a Saviour; a deliberate acceptance of his salvation in the way he proposes it to our acceptance; and a full resolution to renounce whatever is inconsistent with this sacred transaction.

This conviction indeed may be very different in the effects it produces, and especially in the sensible impression it makes on the mind, according to the different degrees of its strength, and the tempers it has to work upon. But where there is no care about these things, no impressions of their importance, no resolutions to submit to the gospel-method of salvation, or none that are abiding and operative, it is a sure sign that we are not ready for Christ's second appearance. The only way in which we can hope to be so, when he appears a second time without sin unto salvation, is, to have seen and improved the design of his first appearance, when he came to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Without having fallen in with this, from a previous conviction of our undone condition without him, sincerely humbled ourselves for, and heartily repented of those sins which were the cause of his appearance, and found a willingness, in dependence on his grace and the powerful operations

rations of his spirit, to part with every sin for his sake, and to exert ourselves to the utmost in whatever he requires, we can have no meetness for an inheritance among the saints in light. No pretensions to moral duty and obedience however fair and specious, no acts of kindness and benevolence however extensive and useful, no degree of reputation in the world however high and well founded, will be of any avail in the judgment-day, any further than they are the fruits and evidence of our faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

As to those who chuse to depend on these things as the matter of their justification before God, they would do well to consider, whether these acts of duty and obedience on which they depend be perfect; so perfect that the piercing eye of God can discover no flaw in them; whether this is, and always has been the case with their every duty; and whether the temper of their mind with respect to the love of God, gratitude for his mercies, trust in, and submission to him, &c. be as perfect as their moral obedience? If not, (and he must be a great stranger either to his own heart, or to the purity and extent of God's law, or to both, who can say it is) then it will become them further to consider, whether that law by which they seek justification does not absolutely require all this of those who seek for justification by it, and pronounce an awful curse on every one who continueth not in *all things* that are written in the book of the law to do them; and whether there be any hope of redemption from the curse of the law except by faith in him, who, with a love never to be matched, condescended to take away

way this curse by being himself made a curse for his believing people, when he bare their sins on his own body on the tree. I know a mighty stress is laid on the efficacy of repentance, and some seem as if they thought the Almighty was obliged to pardon them if penitent: But sure a thoughtful person will consider that God is holy and just as well as merciful, and that when he has proposed his way of mercy, it must be highly dangerous to slight it, or seek for any other. And those who consider the ravages which death (the confessed consequence and punishment of sin) is daily making among all, even the best of mankind, notwithstanding all their penitence, will not depend too much upon it for the remission of any punishments sin may meet with in a future world. But I fear I shall exceed the bounds allowed me if I proceed any further on this subject*, and therefore go on to add, that preparation for the coming of Christ implies,

3. That we keep his coming habitually in view: That in all actions of importance we se-

* As this always appeared to me to be the only gospel way of salvation, so I take the liberty to add, that I have the same views of things now that I am in the near prospect of eternity. The approach of death, whatever change it makes in my body, makes no change in my apprehension of the way of salvation by Jesus Christ. Nay, the more closely I think of it, the more I admire and am delighted with it, as a scheme every way worthy a gracious and holy God to propose, and a poor ruined sinner to receive. I am sensible the above is but a very imperfect account of it; but it is the best I knew how to give in the short compass allowed for it by the nature of my discourse. Those who wish to see it fully explained, will do well to consult Dr. Doddridge's *Rise and Progress*: A book which I earnestly wish in the hands of every one, it being, in my apprehension, one of the best extant. [See particularly Chap. IX.]

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riously consider how they will bear the test of that great and terrible day of the Lord, when the judgment-seat shall be set, and the actions of all mankind pass in impartial review: That we often ask ourselves what we shall think of them when we come to give an account of ourselves to God, and appear before his tribunal stripped of every disguise: That we set the Lord God always before us, and ever consider ourselves as under his inspection: That we propose his glory as the ultimate end of all our actions, and make his written word (so far as is consistent with human weakness) not only the sole directory of our religious worship, but of our conduct to our fellow-creatures, and the government of our appetites and passions. In a word, that we speak and think, and behave, as those who must be judged by the perfect law of liberty, and know that it is a little matter to be judged of men, or of man's judgment, since we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, where not he that commends himself shall be approved, neither he that is commended by others, but whom the Lord commendeth; that Lord who has given us the gospel as the rule of our actions at present, and assured us, that it will be his rule of judgment at last. Thus will the prepared Christian endeavour to have the coming of Christ in habitual view, and to act under the constant influence of it. And oh! what a surprising alteration would it make in the tempers and conduct of mankind, could they be persuaded thus habitually to regard it! How clearly would this enable them to judge, and how properly would it dispose them to act, in many cases which, when this is out of view, appear to their prejudiced minds dark and perplexed! How cau-
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tious would it make them in their words and actions! How temperate in all things! How just in their dealings, how fervent in their devotions! How zealous for God, how careful to redeem their time! How dead to the world, and all its enjoyments, further than affection for them is consistent with faith and a good conscience! In a word, how becoming the gospel of Christ would their conversation then be, and how ornamental to it! Men would not then drink and swear, lie and steal, and live as without God in the world, as too many now do. No. Such views of their final appearance before Christ would give them different apprehensions of things, and effectually engage them to deny all ungodliness and every worldly lust, and live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present evil world. Happy consequence of keeping this great event in constant and habitual view! Happy to ourselves, and happy to society! What reason have we to seek such a regard to it ourselves, and to endeavour, as far as may be, to bring others under the influence of it!

Some indeed (but very few when compared with those who run into the contrary extreme) have carried this too far, and have thought they could not keep an eternal world properly in view without going out of this. This is both irrational and unscriptural, and (if we may judge by its effects) as opposite to the end it proposes to secure, as it is either to reason or scripture. A man knows not indeed when his Lord will come; and I believe, had men, and especially good men, always their choice, they would desire (and justly) to go out of the world in an act of devotion and submissive acknowledgment of
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the justice of their heavenly Father's will, after having examined with particular seriousness into their past life, and the foundation of their present hopes, and anew committed their departing spirits into the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. But in this, as in every other respect, a good man may cheerfully leave things to the disposal of his heavenly Father; and (provided the time be proper, and he be pursuing his worldly business in a consistency with faith and a good conscience, and in due subordination to his eternal interest) may die as contentedly and as safely in his shop or his counting-house, as in his bed or on his knees. He is even here employed about his master's business, and happy is such a person wherever he is found. God beholds him at all times with approbation, and wherever he dies, he may be sure, that not only the time, but the place, is appointed by his adorable heavenly Father, and that his angels shall with pleasure receive his departing spirit, and safely convey it to those happy mansions over which the second death has no power. Once more,

4. Readiness for Christ's coming implies, that we frequently examine into our present situation with relation to it. The former constitutes habitual, this actual readiness. The former is necessary to our having our accounts in good order; this to our being assured that they are so. This is that in which a good man would wish to spend his last moments, and that which (in subordination to any opportunity he might have of speaking for God with advantage) makes some intimations of approaching dissolution principally desirable. We may be sure therefore he will be often found in the exercise of it.

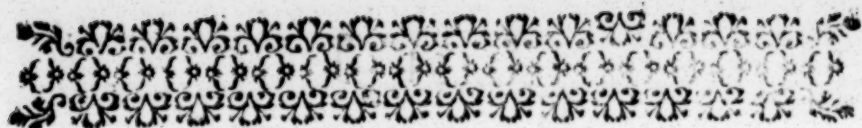
If indeed the former be duly attended to, the want of this will not affect a man's eternal interests. His account will in such a case be ready, though not exactly balanced. This is however very desirable, and will be attended with many advantages. The prudent and exact tradesman may often learn valuable hints, by reviewing his books, and reflecting on his past transactions in business, even when his affairs are upon the whole in good order. So may the Christian, by frequently examining into the state of his soul. In the hurry of action, both are apt to omit little particulars, tho' no great ones, and to let slip many opportunities which if well improved might be turned to good account.

A Christian will not indeed review a life he has reason to hope has, in the main, been spent to the glory of God, with that painful solicitude which attends his first examination. He will not be always examining with anxiety, like one who dreads to find something amiss; but like a prudent tradesman who reviews his accounts with pleasure, because, conscious that whatever little error or mistake he may find out, his books are in the main right. And I may add, that when a man dares not look into the great account between God and his soul, for fear of being pained by such a review, whatever figure he may make in the Christian world, it is as sure a sign of an approaching bankruptcy in the divine life, as a like apprehension and conduct with respect to temporal affairs indicates in the mercantile.

In these several particulars does readiness for the coming of Christ consist, and to some one of them may every thing necessary thereto be reduced.

duced. What, my brethren, if we pause here, and by these plain *criteria* examine whether we are ready? What preparations have we made for that world on the confines of which we stand? Oh my soul! hast thou seriously examined into thy state with respect to an eternal world? Art thou convinced of its infinite importance, and at the same time of thy unfitness to partake of its felicity both in a legal and a moral view? Has this convinced thee of thy need of Jesus as a Saviour, and of the Spirit as a sanctifier? Has it also humbled thee so as to make thee willing submissively to receive the salvation of Jesus in his own way, and upon his own terms? Are all thy actions weighed in the balance of eternity, and an exact care preserved that they be not hereafter found wanting? To this purpose are they frequently and seriously reviewed? And does such a review prove satisfactory, and enable thee to rejoice in a prevailing conformity between thy temper and conduct, and the written word of God, the great rule of thy present conduct and future judgment? Is the grace of God humbly and thankfully acknowledged in what thou art? Are earnest and repeated applications made to the blood of sprinkling for the pardon of thy numerous short-comings and imperfections as well as thy more heinous offences? And, conscious that when thou hast done thy best, thou art but an unprofitable servant, are all thy hopes of acceptance for thy person and imperfect services founded on the Lord Jesus, the great foundation-stone on which alone thy hopes for eternity can securely rest? If thou can'st, upon an impartial examination, say, that in the main this is thy earnest desire and constant care, thou art ready; and
whenever

whenever the Lord Jesus shall say, " Surely, I
 " come quickly," how sudden soever that ap-
 proach may be, thou may'st echo back with in-
 effable delight, " Amen: even so, come, Lord
 " Jesus!" But if not, if thou hast never
 known what it was seriously to examine into thy
 state; if thou hast never seen the absolute need
 of Jesus as a Saviour, or if such a conviction has
 not engaged thee seriously and deliberately to
 commit thyself to his care, with particular re-
 ference to that day, and willingly to subject thy-
 self to all his requirements as holy, just, and
 good, thou art in the gall of bitterness and in
 the bond of iniquity, and hast reason to reflect
 with the utmost terror on his approach, who will
 render to every man according to his works, and
 fix the proper rewards unchangeably and for
 ever. God give thee grace seriously and imme-
 diately to consider it, lest in such an hour as
 thou thinkest not the Son of Man should come.



DISCOURSE II.

MAT. XXIV. 44.

Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.

THE Christian life being a constant scene of difficulty and opposition, nothing can be more important to its continued existence than watchfulness. This will keep a man out of a thousand dangers, and prepare him for resisting those which he cannot avoid, with peculiar advantage. And accordingly we find, that (except prayer, which is ever to be regarded as the first and principal support of the divine life in the soul) nothing is more frequently recommended in scripture than watchfulness. To repeat passages in support of so plain an observation would be needless. This is urged upon us by the most cogent motives; motives against which, nothing but that sad disinclination which all, while in their natural state, have to divine things, could be proof. It is especially and repeatedly urged upon us by the consideration of the uncertainty of the time of his appearance, to whom we must give an account of all the things done in the body, and by whose righteous sentence consequent hereupon, our state must be finally determined. This is the motive by which it is enforced in the text, and from which the

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reasonableness and propriety of watching against every thing which might unfit us for an appearance before God, as well as of exerting a constant care to be habitually prepared for this awful and interesting event, is naturally inferred, and at the same time the advantages of it obviously insinuated, from the care which men commonly take about things of infinitely less moment whenever they imagine them to be in danger, and the slavery to which they willingly submit, in order to secure them. Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the good man of the house had known at what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.

I have shewn in the preceding discourse wherein this readiness for the coming of Christ consists. I now proceed,

Idly, To illustrate and apply the awful motive by which the exhortation in our text is enforced: *For at such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh.*

Now, this declaration plainly expresses or implies, that the Son of Man will certainly come; that this event will be sudden and altogether unexpected; and therefore, that if we be not always ready, we may be surprized in an unprepared state, the consequence of which will be infinitely dreadful. Bear with me while I speak a little to each of these, and then endeavour briefly

ly to apply them. May God apply them to each of our hearts.

1. The text expressly assures us, that the Son of Man will certainly come.

This we are as sure of as scripture can make us. It is there asserted in numberless places, and in language the most plain and expressive. Such an event, indeed, appears highly necessary to manifest the divine perfections, particularly his regard to virtue, and his displeasure against sin, neither of which seem sufficiently displayed at present. He will at that time which he has appointed, judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained, of which he has given the most undeniable assurance to all men, in that he has raised him from the dead, (Acts xvii. 31.) The Son of Man will come in the most transcendent manner, with thousands of thousands ministering unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousands standing before him, (Dan. vii. 10.), to await their doom from his awful sentence. At that great day we are told he will come in flaming fire to take vengeance on those that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power, but at the same time to be glorified in his saints and admired in all them that believe, 2 Thes. i. 8. 10. Nothing can prevent this his approach. We may indeed chuse whether we will prepare for his coming or not, but we can in no wise prevent his coming, or so much as delay it for one single moment. The day is appointed by infinite wisdom, and recorded in the book of his decrees,

which can suffer no change, but are firm as his eternal throne.

Oh, my soul! what an event will this be! what a view will it give of the characters of men! How will the bold blasphemer, who at every turn was calling for hell and damnation on himself and others, as though they were the most trifling things in the world, be struck silent as death! How will the fair professor, whose hypocritical appearances deceived, whilst here, the most discerning, be stripped of every disguise! How will those who set all laws, human and divine, at defiance, and said in effect with a presumptuous confidence, both to God and man, Our conduct is our own, who is Lord over us? be then so alarmed as to call on the rocks and mountains to fall on them, and cover them from the presence of him that sitteth on the throne, and the wrath of the Lamb, Rev. vi. 16. How important will this make the salvation of Jesus appear! How happy they who are interested in it, though here, like their divine Master, they were despised of men and rejected! Oh, my soul! acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace, and thereby good shall come unto thee, even in this great and terrible day of the Lord. The text assures us further,

2. That this his coming will be altogether unexpected.

This, our Lord, a few verses before the text, expressly assures us will be the case with all those who shall be found alive at his coming. As it was in the days of Noah, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days that
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were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, and marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not till the flood came and took them all away, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be, (ver. 37.) So shall it be to all. While the bridegroom tarried, all the virgins, both the wise and the unwise, slumbered and slept. So also shall the good and the bad continue pursuing their respective employments, without any particular alarm, till the voice of the archangel and the trump of God summon them to the judgment-seat of Christ. There shall no change happen, nor any extraordinary events take place in the moral world, previous hereto, which may indicate the immediate approach of the Son of Man. As things have continued pretty much the same since the creation, except with regard to that awful and altogether unexpected event the flood, so have we reason to believe they will continue the same to the end of time. On this account the event will, as to the time of its taking place, be altogether unexpected to all, to the good as well as to the bad; nor have we any thing from which we can make the least guess at the time in which it will happen. Nay, we are assured, (and it is frequently repeated as a thought of considerable importance), that it is concealed from angels themselves, and known to the Father only, who keeps it inscrutably locked up in his own all-comprehensive mind, to the end, no doubt, that we and all concerned in it may be kept in a watching posture. Let us, my brethren, ever learn this important lesson from the care with which it is concealed from us, and see to it, that we do not in this, any more than in

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other respects, counteract the designs of an all-gracious God to the injury of our own souls.

And the observation is equally true with regard to *Death*, that great harbinger of judgment. The uncertainty of the time of dying is so generally believed, that it has passed into a common proverb: "I thought no more of it than I did of my dying day," is the manner in which many profanely express their surprise at some unthought of event. Tho' the thoughts of death will not (any more than those of judgment) be at any time so far banished from a good man's mind as to render him habitually unprepared for it, yet may the time of it be very unexpected. This is wisely kept out of the sight of all. Few are aware of it till very near it, and many are taken away without the least warning. How much then does it concern us to be always ready! At such an hour as we think not, the Son of Man may come, either by judgment, or at least by death, which is of equal importance to us all, as it introduces us to the judgment-seat of Christ, and places us exactly in the same circumstances in which we shall be found at the actual appearing of the judge. If therefore we are not always ready, I observe, as the

3d Particular contained in this awful motive, we may be surpris'd in an unprepared state.

This is obviously implied in the text, and naturally follows from the foregoing particulars. Since we know not what to-morrow may bring forth, he that defers till to-morrow what ought to be done to-day, runs an evident risk of being disappointed in his designs; and in this case is in
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danger of being found unprepared for eternity. This is a surprise to which the ungodly are peculiarly liable. A consciousness that they are not ready, joined to an unwillingness to prepare, makes them equally unwilling to think about dying. Sometimes, alas! this makes it almost necessary, when they are in danger of death, for others to keep them ignorant, lest their apprehension of it should increase their disorder, and precipitate their ruin. And too commonly it prevents them from attending to many intimations from which others easily enough foresee their approaching dissolution, and from which they themselves would also clearly enough infer it, were they not afraid to reflect. The same circumstances would as effectually blind them against any indications of the coming of the Son of Man to judgment, (should any such be given), were they to be found alive at his coming. It is most apparent therefore, that those who are not *always* ready, may, and probably will, be found *unready*, when the Son of man cometh, or sends death to summon them before his judgment-seat. He may come soon without affording them time to prepare, or suddenly without giving them a moment's warning; and however long the time of his appearance be deferred, those things which tempt them to omit preparation *to-day*, will continue to tempt them *to-morrow*, and will most probably have equal, if not greater, influence. Whatsoever therefore thy hands find thee to do, do it *immediately* with all thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest, and on the confines of which thou may'st now stand. I shall only add,

4. That the consequence of being thus surprised will be infinitely dreadful.

This is not indeed expressed in the text; but it is plainly implied, and is necessary to complete the argument; for otherwise, men might remain unprepared, without being concerned about the consequence, and safely harden their necks against all God's repeated reproofs.

Thus, our Lord, a few verses after the text, after assuring us of the honour and happiness to which he who is then found ready shall be advanced, adds (in language sufficient to alarm the most stupid in any case but that of his soul), If that wicked servant shall say in his heart, my lord delayeth his coming, and shall, in a dependence hereupon, begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken, the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrite; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, ver. 47. *. As a severe master would treat a *slave*, who should thus abuse the trust he had reposed in him, will God treat us if found by him at his Son's appearance in similar circumstances. But infinitely more dreadful will be the punishment which he will inflict on all such as prove unfaithful to his trust, than the most rigorous and inexorable master would inflict upon the meanest slave who

* In order properly to understand this passage, the reader must remember, that slaves were then in general use, and recollect the power which masters had over them, and the punishments they sometimes inflicted upon them. On this head, see *Doddridge's Fam. Expos.* upon the place.

should be found guilty of the greatest excesses. The one, at most, could but kill the *body*, by slow and lingering tortures; the other can, and in such a case we are assured certainly will, destroy both soul and body in hell, in that dismal place where their worm never dies, and the fire shall never be quenched, (Mark ix. 44. &c.); where they shall seek death, and shall not find it; and desire to die, and death shall fly from them, Rev. ix. 6. Sad issue indeed of a careless state! Dreadful consequence of neglecting to prepare for that great event which we all expect! With what propriety does our Lord again and again exhort us to be ready. — Let us then be engaged to attend to his exhortation, and let us be suitably influenced by the awful motive which has now been illustrated. — Let us (according to the explication which was given in the former discourse, of the precept in the text) seriously consider the nature and certainty of that great event, the coming of the Son of Man. — Let us use our utmost endeavours to prepare for it. — Let us keep it in constant view, and frequently be examining what our situation is with relation to it, influenced by the affecting considerations which have now been suggested: — that we know that the Son of Man will certainly come to judgment; but that we know not at what period this awful event shall take place, nor when we shall be called hence: — that we may therefore be surprised by it in an unprepared state; and that if we are, the consequence will be infinitely dreadful.

Let us then, my brethren, take the advice so kindly given us, and be always upon the watch, lest, coming suddenly, our Lord find us sleeping.

ing. Let us work the works of him that sent us, while it is called *to-day*. Oh, let us not say in our hearts, “*To-morrow* I will examine into the state of my soul! *to-morrow*, I will commit it into the hands of the Lord Jesus, to be kept by him till that day; from *to-morrow* I will keep eternity in constant view, and each day, by careful examination and renewed application to the blood of sprinkling, balance the great account between God and my soul!”

Alas! we know not what a day may bring forth: This night our souls may be required at our hands, and then what will become of our purposes and resolutions for the morrow? To day is our’s; to-morrow is God’s. To-day we enjoy the means of grace; to-morrow they may be for ever hid from our eyes. To-day we are in time; to-morrow we may be in eternity, and, if not prepared, shall be in unchangeable and eternal wretchedness. *To-day*, therefore, while it is called to-day, if ever you mean to hear his voice, who calls you with the most persuasive eloquence to fly from the wrath to come, and lay hold on eternal life, harden not your hearts, lest in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man should come.

Let me press this serious and immediate attention to the things that belong to their peace, on all careless unprepared sinners here present, by all the regard they have to their present or final happiness. In such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh; therefore be ye also ready, said the kind compassionate Saviour. And he well knew what he said, and the importance of an attention to it, though many will not credit him, and seem resolved at all events to make the
desperate

desperate experiment, whether he may be depended on or not; whether his coming be so certain and so sudden, and whether, in its consequences, so dreadful as has been said. Thou shalt know, presumptuous sinner, thou shalt know to thy cost, in the day when thou shalt go into the inner chamber to hide thyself, 1 Kings xxii. 25. If the Lord do not in mercy convince thee before, and cause an attention to the awful truth to command thy whole soul; the day, wherein kings and great men, and chief captains and mighty men, shall call upon the rocks and the mountains to fall on them, and cover them from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne and the wrath of the Lamb, shall flash conviction in upon thy mind with evidence which it will be impossible for thee to resist, and will fill thee with such horror, that were it not thou art made immortal, thou couldst not sustain. And art thou resolved to make the experiment, and in thy own person, and at the peril of thy soul, to try how far all these things are true? First at least give these things an impartial hearing. If thou art a wise man, thou wilt. They are matters of infinite consequence. Thy conscience tells thee they are. Set then apart a few moments *this evening* to recollect what thou hast this day heard, and the evidence by which it has been supported, and then seriously ask thyself, whether an immortal soul may be safely and rationally ventured on the supposed falsity of them; and if it may not, whether it be not thy wisdom to make immediate preparation before the Son of Man cometh. Couldst thou bear the thoughts of giving up all hopes toward God and Christ, and eternity? Couldst thou deliberately renounce all dependence on God, and dare

dare him to do his worst? Thou couldst not : the most desperate abandoned sinner on earth could not. Why, then, wilt thou venture on his displeasure by sinning against him, and presumptuously continue in an unprepared state, after all the kind invitations and awful warnings he has given thee? Is it in hopes that his declarations are not faithful and true, or in their consequences not so fatal? Rather is it not in the prospect of hereafter preparing to meet thy God? But what is that life on which these presumptuous hopes are built? Is it not a vapour, that appeareth for a little while, and then vanisheth away? Is not this the scripture-account of it? and have we not every day the most demonstrative and affecting proofs of its shortness and uncertainty? I will not ask thee, in the language of the prophet, *Zeck. i. 5. Thy fathers, where are they?* But where are many of thy *acquaintance* and *companions*, persons of thine own age, and even younger than thyself? With whom thou once tookest sweet counsel, and went to the house of *mirth* in company?—The church-yard will tell thee.—Oh! think of their fate, and tremble for thy own.

As to the coming of the Son of man to judgment, it is an event which, probably, neither you nor I shall ever see in the land of the living. Nay, when we consider how many prophecies have yet to receive their completion, it is most probable, none of the present inhabitants of the earth shall then be found alive. But what is that to thee or me? Shall we, on that account, think ourselves safe; and in a presumption hereupon, hear, without dismay, all the awful threatenings of God's word? Indulge not such a presumptuous hope, unprepared sinner. I charge it
upon

upon thee, O my soul, not to indulge it. The Son of man may come in a fever, or a palsy, or an apoplexy, as effectually as in the judgment-day, and as suddenly too. Who that has made the least observation on the progress of the king of terrors, and the various times and ways in which he asserts his empire over those whom sin has subjected to his dominion, knows not that in the midst of life we are in death? And who that has read God's word, or even seriously attended to the dictates of natural reason, is not aware also that as death leaves us, judgment will find us? In love then to your souls, and as you wish to have them safe in the day of the Lord Jesus, let me beseech all unprepared sinners, whatsoever is yet to be done before you can die with safety, to do it with all your might, and to do it immediately. What is become of thousands who trifled with convictions, and made light of the calls of the gospel, in hopes of a more convenient season? Alas! they are undone for ever: and those very calls and convictions are now aggravating their condemnation, are ministering food to the worm that never dies, fuel to the fire that shall never be quenched. What would have become of thousands more, had they made the same desperate experiment? They also had come to this place of torment. And what will become of you, if you act the same stupid and inconsiderate part? If the word of God be faithful and true (and heaven and earth shall pass away sooner than the smallest tittle of it fail to be accomplished) you shall share their condemnation whose folly you have imitated; and this very discourse (which, God is my witness, is sincerely designed, in dependance on his grace, to forward your salvation) shall prove the occasion of your aggravated ruin.

ruin. Be persuaded, then, as you value your souls, and wish to have them safe in the day of the Lord Jesus, to give all diligence to prepare for his coming. Fly, fly as for your lives, as for the lives of your precious, perishing, immortal souls, to the city of refuge which God has appointed, lest the avenger of his broken law overtake you in your sins, and you perish for ever.

And what I say unto *you*, I say also to the pious and good, Watch and be ready. Endeavour to keep in the fear of the Lord, and the views of eternity, all the day long : and by frequent and serious self-examination, to have the great account between God and your souls in constant and exact readiness. Day by day, let application be made to him who is mighty to save, for grace to help in every time of need ; and to the blood of sprinkling, for the pardon of those various infirmities with which, after all, your best services will be attended. Then will you have no need to start at the thoughts of death or judgment ; it will not be in the power of either (come it as suddenly as it may) to hurt you. You may view the king of terrors, at whatever time, and in whatever way he approaches, without uneasiness. Jesus, who has abolished death, and secured to himself the keys of that dark prison, where all his captives are bound, assures you, that because he lives, ye shall live also. Nay, you may lift up your head with rejoicing, amidst all the horrors of a consuming world : Jesus, the judge, is your friend, and his almighty patronage will be found a sufficient covert from all the tempests of that great and terrible day, which will lay a world in ruin ; and the faith of Jesus shall secure his persevering saints from all the terrible conse-

quences of it. But if any man *draw back* (whatever his professions, whatever his advantages, whatever his attainments may have been) my soul, saith the Lord, shall have no pleasure in him. Let us then never be of them that draw back to perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul, *Heb. x. 38, 39.* Let us study and pray, and watch and labour, that we may always be, not only habitually, but *actually* ready, that so we may be able to welcome the Saviour's approach. It is but a few more months or years, it may be with respect to us but a few more *days* or *hours*, and he that shall come, will come, and his reward shall be with him.

God grant that we may all be found of him in peace, and that we may not be ashamed before him at his coming. AMEN.





P O S T S C R I P T.

I Cannot help warmly recommending STATED EVENING-RETIREMENT for SELF-EXAMINATION and PRAYER, as one of the best means of keeping our souls in constant readiness for the coming of Christ.

I know indeed this will be very inconsistent with that way of living which the love of pleasure has introduced, which has had such an alarming spread of late years in this poor infatuated land, and which many think the only happy life. It must be confessed, that the PLAY-HOUSE, the ASSEMBLY-ROOM, and the EVENING-CLUBS, are no fit associates for such a life of close communion with God. Hence I fear it is, that the duties of the closet, as well as of the family, are so much worse attended than they were in the days of our pious forefathers. Persons see the utility of such exercises, but they cannot think of the denial they must practise if they fall in with them. To give up their evening-amusements, appears a burden too grievous to be born; and so it must to those who are lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

But if there be a real spirit of piety in the soul, (and this, I would gladly hope, is the case with some, who, through unhappy connections,
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the force of education, and a variety of other circumstances, are much too fond of these kinds of amusements,) they will not find the difficulty so great. At least, this I am sure of, that with whatever difficulty corrupt nature may be brought to submit to it, a truly pious mind, even amidst all its remaining attachments to vanity, will find a satisfaction in having denied itself for God, far more solid and permanent than any to be met with at the PLAY-HOUSE or the ASSEMBLY-ROOM.

Wherever this is not the case, it is high time for a person to stop, and search whether there be not some root of bitterness springing up in the soul, which if not plucked up, may bring forth fruit unto eternal death. He that cannot without difficulty sacrifice his evening *DIVERSIONS* to his evening *DEVOTIONS*, gives a sad proof, that he loves earthly pleasures more than divine; and that, consequently, he is a stranger to the *power of godliness*, whatever profession of religion he may make, and in whatever estimation he may be held by the pious and good.

For the use of those who wish to compose themselves to rest in a pious frame, such a one as they would wish to fall asleep in if sure they should awake in eternity, I shall take the liberty to annex to this discourse that excellent *Meditation on DEATH*, which is to be found at the close of the xixth chapter in Dr. DODDRIDGE's *Rise and Progress*. For, though that book be in far more hands than ever this discourse will come into, yet this may possibly come into the hands of a few who have not the other. I have desired to
have

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have it printed in such a form, as that it may be taken out, framed and hung up, by those who have Christian boldness enough to do it, in the closet or the bed-chamber, where I cannot help thinking it would exhibit a much more suitable object of contemplation than those pictures of vanity which are sometimes to be met with in these places.

A SERIOUS



A SERIOUS VIEW OF DEATH,

Proper to be taken as we lie down on our Beds.

OH my soul, look forward a little with seriousness and attention, and *learn wisdom by the consideration of thy latter end* *. Another of thy mortal days is now numbered and finished: and as I have put off my clothes, and laid myself upon my bed, for the repose of the night; so will the day of life quickly come to its period, so must the body itself be put off, and laid to its repose in a bed of dust. There let it rest; for it will be no more regarded by me, than the clothes which I have now laid aside. I have another far more important concern to attend. Think, O my soul, when death comes, thou art to *enter upon the eternal world*, and to be fixed either *in heaven or in hell*. All the schemes and cares, the hopes and fears, the pleasures and sorrows of life, will come to their period, and the world of spirits will open upon thee. And Oh! *how soon* may it open! Perhaps *before the returning sun* bring on the light of another day. To-morrow's sun may not enlighten mine eyes, but only shine round *a senseless corpse*, which may lie in the place of this animated body. At least the death of many in the flower of their age, and many who were superior to me in capacity, piety, and the prospects of usefulness, may loudly warn me not to depend on a long life, and engage me rather to wonder that I am continued here so many years, than to be surprized if I am speedily removed.

And now, O my soul, answer as in the sight of G O D; *Art thou ready? Art thou ready?* Is there no sin unforfaken, and so unrepented of, to fill me with anguish in my departing moments, and to make me tremble on the brink of eternity? Dread to remain under the guilt of it, and this moment renew thy most earnest applications to the mercy of G O D, and the blood of a Redeemer, for deliverance from it.

But if the great account be already adjusted, if thou hast cordially repented of thy numerous offences, if thou hast sincerely committed thyself by faith into the hands of the blessed J E S U S, and hast not renounced thy covenant with him, by returning to the allowed practice of sin, then *start not at the thoughts of a separation*: It is not in the power of death to hurt a soul devoted to G O D, and united to the great Redeemer. It may take from me my worldly comforts, it may disconcert and break my schemes for service on earth: but, O my soul, diviner entertainments, and nobler services wait thee beyond the grave. For ever blessed be the name of G O D and the love of J E S U S, for these quieting, encouraging, joyful views! I will now *lay me down in peace, and sleep* †, free from the fears of what shall be the issue of this night, whether life or death may be appointed for me. *Father, into thine hand I commend my spirit* ‡; for *Thou hast redeemed me, O God of truth* §, and therefore I can chearfully refer it to thy choice, whether I shall wake in this world or another.

* Deut. xxii. 29.

† Psal. iv. 8.

‡ Luke xxiii. 46.

§ Psal. xxxi. 5.